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OBITUARY

Diarmuid Murphy (1963-2020): An Appreciation



The Culinary Arts community in Ireland and the international gastronomic research community were shocked to hear the sad news of the passing of the unique individual and gentleman, Diarmuid Murphy; colleague, friend, and remarkable educator in the School of Culinary Arts and Food Technology at Technological University Dublin. A bit of an enigma, Diarmuid was a relatively quiet, humble, and private individual, yet also an acerbic joker and Renaissance man, with an encyclopaedic memory and an inimitable, irreverent outlook on life. Many of us have fond memories of Diarmuid holding court late at night at the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery, entertaining his audience with topics ranging from left wing politics, Luton Town FC “Madhatters”, mid-17th century agrarian socialists known as the “Diggers”, and the music of The Clash or Billy Bragg, to English chain pubs being in the real estate business rather than the hospitality business, and stories of various “geezers” he met “walking down Edgeware Road.”

A passionate, charismatic, inspirational, and challenging teacher who loved his work, Diarmuid initially portrayed a stern exterior, and started his classes by outlining penalties for the late submission of assignments, recommending that written work should be “all killer and no filler.” However, he had a real soft, caring, pastoral side, and few students did not, at some point, receive sage advice or encouragement from him privately after class to help them on their journey. He would regularly ask colleagues to keep an eye on certain individuals who he felt were going through a tough time or who were finding college difficult. One colleague described his “uncanny ability to have a genuine interest and informed opinion on whatever was important in your world, especially if you were one of his students.” This was clearly evident in the huge outpouring of messages from former students and colleagues describing his passion, caring, humorous and inspirational qualities in the Books of Condolences on RIP.ie and on the Funeral Director’s website.

Born within the sound of Bow Bells at Charring Cross Hospital, London, on 31st March 1963, to Irish parents, both of whom hailed from County Offaly, Diarmuid Sean Murphy, was both entitled and proud to call himself a “Cockney” and relished being a true Londoner. Although born in London and raised in Luton, he always had a deep connection with Ireland, especially with Clonbullogue where his late father Seamus came from, and with Edenderry where his mother Marie comes from. Diarmuid spent every summer there as a young boy.

Diarmuid left school at 16 and began a career in professional cookery. He did his City & Guilds 706/1 in Luton, spending part of his apprenticeship in St Tropez, France; his 706/2 were completed in Blackpool and in 1987 he completed the City & Guilds 706/3 in Walthamstow College in London. His early culinary career coincided with “the golden years” of his beloved Luton Town FC when they spent a decade (1982-1992) in the Premier Division. Having worked his way through each of the classical chef roles (*Saucier, Tournant, Poissonier, Sous*) in many of London’s leading establishments, he became head chef in CIRCA restaurant (1989-1991). It was at this time, while wearing a “Saw Doctors T-Shirt” that he was introduced to Anne-Marie English and the love story that would eventually see Diarmuid follow her back to Dublin a few years later, began. Diarmuid and Anne-Marie were married in Dunlavin in October 2000. From 1997 to 2009, Diarmuid worked in a number of hotels and restaurants in Dublin and was group Executive Chef for FXB’s, in charge of five restaurants, for several years. Life at home was busy with the arrival of Emer, Róisín, and Diarmuid Óg, not to forget Paws the dog.

Diarmuid returned to education at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) and in 2013 graduated from the BA (Hons) Culinary Arts with a First-Class Honours. In 2013-14, he completed the M.Sc. Culinary Innovation and New Product Development within one year, also gaining a First-Class Honours, all while working full-time and raising a young family. Diarmuid joined the lecturing team in DIT, Cathal Brugha Street in September 2013 teaching Gastronomy (to undergraduate and M.Sc. students), Culinary Arts Performance, Theory of Food, and Menu French. He was pivotal in establishing the MA Gastronomy and Food Studies degree in 2017 and taught modules during two semesters of the programme as well as supervising MA theses. He presented papers at the Dublin Gastronomy Symposium and co-authored a paper for RTE Brainstorm on “How to make a Brexit Christmas Pudding.” If this was not enough, Diarmuid was more than half way through his PhD journey when his sudden illness forced him to put his studies on hold.

Diarmuid made a huge impression on colleagues, not only in his own School but right across TU Dublin. They will miss his affability and “wonderful sense of value and perspective”, that “quirky sense of humour, one-liner comment and lively banter.” Dr. Frank Cullen, Diarmuid’s Head of School and PhD supervisor, recalls his passion and commitment to both the School and his students, noting the extra-curricular work Diarmuid carried out on Franco-Irish cultural exchange and in promoting healthy eating on a budget for children and families in conjunction with the City of Dublin Education and Training Board.

Diarmuid showed true passion for all his various professional, academic, social, and sporting interests, but above all, he was a dedicated and committed family man who cherished his wife and children. Whether supporting St Brendan’s juvenile GAA teams, walking the dog in the Phoenix Park, or early morning phone calls ensuring his daughter had made it safely to school, his first focus was his family. Friends remember

many wonderful meals in the Murphy household and one comment captures Diarmuid's true essence: "while preparing and delivering the mini-feast, he would impart a few nuggets of his astute and humorous life-observations and intriguing philosophical musings ... all the while injecting bits of divilment and side stories into the conversation.... his knowledge of macro and micro world events was astounding."

Diarmuid will be sorely missed by all of his friends and his colleagues, old and new, in TU Dublin and by all of his current and former students whom he inspired with his unique, irreverent, inquisitive but always supportive style and panache. In a special ceremony on the 12th March 2021, TU Dublin will present Anne-Marie and family with a posthumous PhD for Diarmuid.

Ní bheidh a leithéid ann aríst.



Diarmuid Murphy (far right) with colleagues on the MA Gastronomy and Food Studies